Trip To Keady

Sometimes, taking the odd ‘race’ up to Keady from Armagh, I have that lovely nostalgic feeling. The companionship of the friendly neighbours is vivid. The long years of ‘the troubles’ dimmed in my mind.

Slowly driving through the main street, named Killowen, the barber’s shop is alive with a new generation needing a hair cut. The barber’s son kept busy. The men’s clothing store still on the go. Kieley’s grocery is now a bank. Teasey Nugents long since gone. The market house

demolished. Our old home now a pizza place.

Those happiest times flood my mind. But I dare not stop. As I visit my sister Noreen she fills me with the latest gossip. She who always worried about ‘the ducks going barefoot,’ my ma used to say. Knows very few people left in our town.

Now living in Armagh, most of married life, our city too was bombed. You would never now know that as the shops and homes are fully restored. Looking the same as rebuilt in the previous Victorian and Georgian style. It’s a happy place once

again. Full of emigrants from war torn places. We do not begrudge their presence.

Keady too, is now renewed. The pub blown up during ‘the troubles,’ is now a busy hub, an electrical store just across from the ‘pizza parlour,’ our old home.

James, my brother, emigrated to Australia to join his children. His wife now the happiest of mothers. Two of our girls emigrated during those ‘troubled’ years. Who would blame them? James now free to play his banjo without fear of attacks. Our girls happy and content.

An old acquaintance, paused me in the street, in Armagh. As we both reminisced, the conversation flowed. “Your home was the last of those lively ceili houses in the county. It was a true treasure. Jack Makem’s old home still exists,” he added. “Now a culture cottage, ‘Tossey’s Cottage,’ in Derrynoose. Just outside Keady. A renowned haven of the Makem singing family.”

Tommy Makem, our famous Irish singer, photos adorn its wall,” my friend added. “You need to book to go there. The music and fiddlers play the tunes. Traditional Bodrans, spoon playing too along with guitars and

banjos all joining in with songs," his excited voice exclaimed.

Soon we plan to go there. Michael and I. Having a photo, treasured by me, sitting in Jack Makem's old home beside the other 'Jack the chemist' and Tommy playing music with me singing along. My sixteen year old self knew then the happiness of it. I will bring a copy of the photo to that haven. That conversation on the street of Armagh embedded all these stories in my heart forever.

Sometimes I dream too. Standing on the landing in our old home. Looking out over the back

fields and beyond the railway line. Thinking about James. Getting the shock of the switch without the cover. “Your turn tomorrow,” he gleefully says, “Your turn to switch off the light”, Noreen adding “Your shock time.”